

## **Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation Fee Waiver Guidelines**

### **General**

These guidelines establish parameters for reducing or waiving outdoor park or indoor facility use fees for community-wide events and activities which benefit the public.

### **Purpose**

The Department is regularly approached to reduce or waive park/facility use fees for events and activities within the County. The guidelines are designed to provide an equitable means for event organizers to apply for fee reductions or waivers and to establish mutually beneficial partnerships between the department and the community.

### **Responsibility**

A fee waiver is granted by the Director at the time of the request. The granting of waivers is dependent upon budget and operating impacts. To the extent a reduction or waiver can be granted without negatively impacting the Department's budget or operations, these guidelines will guide the Director's discretion. No employee, other than the Department Director or his/her designee, has the authority to waive, reduce, or change an established fee by the Mecklenburg County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). The Waiver Request Form must be submitted to the Director in advance of finalizing contracts.

### **Background**

The Department strives to be an exceptional steward of the public's parks and facilities, as well as exceptional stewards of the department budget supported by resident's taxes. To that end, the department charges fees for programs and facility usage to offset the county's tax burden which funds the department. Charging fees is standard practice in the Park & Recreation field when individuals, private groups or non-profit groups wish to reserve and exclusively utilize public facilities (examples include but are not limited to: shelters, fields, tennis or basketball courts, meeting rooms, etc.). The fees associated with reserving public facilities for private use are reviewed each year, approved by the Park and Recreation Commission (PRC), and then ultimately approved by the BOCC.

All fees found in the ActiveNet Management System associated with any facility, program, or sale of goods must be charged to an individual or group, unless a waiver is obtained from the Director. Employees are not authorized to provide or give exclusive use of facilities to groups or individuals at no charge, regardless of the status of the group (ex: partner of the department, non-profit, church group, etc.). If a group or individual wishes to request a fee waiver, those requests must go to the Director.

There is a specific Waiver Request Form located on SharePoint ([link here](#)) that an individual or group can submit to the department for consideration of a fee waiver.

### **Policy General Principles**

Fee waivers/reductions are available for a variety of large events including sporting, tourism, cultural, general and major community events and activities.

Fee waivers/reductions are for established Department facility permit or reservation fees only. Direct costs including but not limited to, vehicle costs, traffic control, staff time, or other County fees are not eligible for a fee waiver or reduction under this policy.



## **Acknowledgement**

All recipients of a fee waiver or reduction shall acknowledge the Department in all publicity relating to the event or activity. Acknowledgement includes County or Department logos and statements in all advertising and promotional material, media releases and in other promotional contexts. Promotional opportunities should be detailed in the event application and contract if required.

## **Events/Activities Not Eligible for Waiver or Reductions**

- Events sponsored by private individuals
- Activities primarily of a fundraising or charitable nature unless the funds directly benefit County-owned facilities
- Events or activities that are not open to the public
- Events that are political in nature or by individuals seeking political office or elected officials for the purpose of an election campaign
- Religious organizations seeking space or facilities for religious services
- Organizations based outside Mecklenburg County (unless the demonstrated benefits are primarily to the residents of Mecklenburg County)
- Projects or organizations who have failed to fulfill their obligations during previous events or activities for which Department facility permit fees were waived or reduced

### **I. Fee Reduction for Use of Parks for Special Events or Activities (outdoor parks and areas, and outdoor or indoor shelters)**

Fee Waivers: On rare occasions, fees and charges may be reduced or waived completely when such action is determined by the Director to be in the best interest of the Department, our residents, and the service applicant.

To be eligible for a 100% fee waiver, the park area must be used for a unique or special "Community Wide Event." For an event to fit this description, it should meet all the following criteria:

- Be open to the entire public at no charge
- Be family friendly
- Be appropriate to the park setting
- Offer activities or events associated with the departments core program areas
- Be offered by a non-profit or not-for-profit established organization

Community Wide Event fee waivers are given for the park rental or facility rental fees. Any direct costs or fees incurred for staffing (staff costs, overtime, etc.) are still applied to the individual or group requesting the facility (example: Festival in the Park pays thousands to cover staffing and overtime, but rental fees are waived, similar to Kings Drive Artwalk and other events where the rental fee is waived, but direct costs are still recovered).

Neighborhood Associations: It has been standing practice for many years to permit neighborhood associations or a neighborhood HOA to utilize their Neighborhood Park for one neighborhood family-oriented event per year at no charge.



Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), City of Charlotte, Central Piedmont Community College and private schools in Mecklenburg County receive an automatic waiver of rental fees for weekday (Monday-Thursday) use of standard open-air picnic shelters, community center rooms and indoor park meeting rooms.

Finally, any organization or group may receive a fee waiver if the organization or entity provides an in-kind or other contribution of goods, services, or programs that benefit Mecklenburg County or its residents. This in-kind contribution may include, but is not limited to, equipment or materials, free attendance for classes or programs, or service projects to improve or to provide programs at the County facilities (example: “sweat equity” or volunteer project, park cleaning, etc.). Any such contribution or volunteerism must be completed and verified prior to the fee waiver request. All proposed in-kind contributions must equal or exceed the value of the reduced Department facility fee or provide a substantial but measurable public benefit.

## **II. Fee Reduction for Use of Athletic Fields**

Youth sports organizations may be eligible for a rental fee reduction if they meet or exceed the following criteria:

- Must be a youth sports organization documented by legal status and insured with General Liability protection per the County’s standards.
- Must show proof of following best practices in the field of youth sports, inclusive of performing background screenings of coaches and administrators.
- Must show proof of providing opportunities to Mecklenburg County youth from families that do not have the financial means to participate.
- Must provide the service at a participant cost substantially lower than the current market rate for the service (as determined by P&R).
- Must provide sports based youth development programs that compliment County programming efforts and are not in direct competition.
- Must be in good financial standing with the County.

## **III. Fee Reduction for Use of Indoor Facilities (Recreation Centers, Nature Centers, Senior Centers, and other indoor facilities)**

Facility rental fees charged for the use of Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation indoor facilities at Recreation Centers, Senior Centers, Nature Centers, etc. may be waived by the Director or his designee, in certain limited cases. **Any applicant requesting such a waiver must submit the appropriate documents demonstrating that the applicant or intended use fall within the following categories:**

- Intergovernmental Cooperation;
- Department Sponsored Program;
- Non-profit providing a Community Service Event.



**Any applicant requesting consideration of their waiver must do the following:**

1. Submit a letter to the Parks & Recreation director on the applicant's letterhead requesting their specific location, date and time for each facility fee waiver. The letter must be signed by an authorized representative.
2. Complete a Facility Reservation Permit application.  
Once/if approved, the applicant will be required to:
3. Submit a copy of the applicant's 501c (3) or (c) (6) non-profit organization documents or any other documents as required, if applicable.
4. Submit a copy of the organizations mission statement, if applicable.
5. Submit a copy of the organizations insurance naming Mecklenburg County additional insured.

**Governmental Waivers**

Fees may be waived for special events or temporary uses by outside government agency's when the use is related to the performance of their normal functions and benefit Mecklenburg County residents.

**Interdepartmental/County Departments**

All Mecklenburg County Departments (DSS, LUESA, FIN, etc.) are allowed a 100% fee waiver for the rental of any facility during normal business hours for meeting purposes. For non-business related activities such as holiday parties, team building, the department will require a transfer of revenue between departments. This request does not require a fee waiver, however the request must be made in advance (written, verbally) to allow for scheduling of the room.

**Other Obligations**

Any reduction or waiver of Department facility permit fees above will not affect the applicant's obligation to comply with the remaining qualifications, restrictions and criteria of this policy, to pay other County costs, or to provide a security deposit or insurance as required by this policy or by ordinance. Liquor license fees cannot be waived or reduced.

Applicants that fail to abide by the guidelines and requirements set forth in this policy will be ineligible to receive future fee waivers or fee reductions for a period of at least one (1) year.

**Procedures**

Requests for a fee waiver or reduction must be made in writing, along with a copy of the organization's IRS 501(c) determination letter (if applicable), as part of a special event application submittal. Please complete the application in its entirety. Incomplete applications will not be considered. If you need additional space for your justification statement, please feel free to attach more pages. The packet should be mailed or dropped off at the address below. The director or his designee shall determine eligibility and make a decision within 10 business days of receipt of the request.

James R. Garges, CPRP, Director  
Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department  
5841 Brookshire Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28216  
C/O Fee Waiver/Reduction Request

*June 9, 2015*